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THE NEW CRITICISM

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THE NEW CRITICISM

A LECTURE

DELIVERED AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

MARCH 9, 1910

BY

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IN COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY



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NOTE

THE present paper on the Newer Ideals of Criticism formed the concluding lecture of a series on the Literatures of the World delivered by a number of the professors of Columbia University during the winter of 1909-10. It was first published (under the general title of "Literary Criticism") in the *Columbia University Lectures on Literature*, from which it is now reprinted.

THE NEW CRITICISM

“WHAT droll creatures these college professors are whenever they talk about art,” wrote Flaubert in one of his letters, and voiced the world’s opinion of academic criticism. For the world shares the view of the Italian poet that “monks and professors cannot write the lives of poets,” and looks only to those rich in literary experience for its opinions on Literature. But the poets themselves have had no special grudge against academic criticism that they have not felt equally for every other kind. For the most part, they have objected to all criticism, since what each mainly seeks in his own case is not criticism, but uncritical praise. “Kill the dog, he is a reviewer,” cried the young Goethe; and in our own age William Morris expressed his contempt for those who earn a livelihood by writing their opinions of the works of others.

Fortunately for criticism, it does not live by the grace of poets, to whom it can be of small service at its best, but by the grace of others who have neither the poet's genius nor the critic's insight. I hope to persuade you this evening that the poets have been mistaken in their very conception of the critic's craft, which lives by a power that poets and critics share together. The secret of this power has come to men slowly, and the knowledge they have gained by it has transformed their idea of Criticism. What this secret is, and into what new paths Criticism is being led by it, is the subject of my lecture to-night.

At the end of the last century, France once more occupied the centre of that stage whose auditors are the inheritors of European civilization. Once more all the world listened while she talked and played, and some of the most brilliant of her talk was now on the question of the authority of Criticism. It is not my purpose to tell you (what you know already) with what sober and vigorous learning the official critics of the *Revue des deux Mondes*

espoused the cause of old gods with the new weapons of science, and with what charm and tact, with what grace and suppleness of thought, Jules Lemaître and Anatole France, to mention no others, defended the free play of the appreciative mind. Some of the sparks that were beaten out on the anvil of controversy have become fixed stars, the classical utterances of Criticism, as when Anatole France described the critic not as a judge imposing sentence, but as a sensitive soul detailing his "adventures among masterpieces."

To have sensations in the presence of a work of art and to express them, that is the function of Criticism for the impressionistic critic. His attitude he would express somewhat in this fashion: "Here is a beautiful poem, let us say 'Prometheus Unbound.' To read it is for me to experience a thrill of pleasure. My delight in it is itself a judgment, and what better judgment is it possible for me to give? All that I can do is to tell how it affects me, what sensations it gives me.

Other men will derive other sensations from it, and express them differently; they too have the same right as I. Each of us, if we are sensitive to impressions and express ourselves well, will produce a new work of art to replace the work which gave us our sensations. That is the art of criticism, and beyond that criticism cannot go." We shall not begrudge this exquisite soul the pleasure of his sensations or his cult of them, nor would he be disconcerted if we were to point out that the interest has been shifted from the work of art to his own impressions. Let us suppose that you say to him: "We are not interested in you, but in 'Prometheus Unbound.' To describe the state of your health is not to help us to understand or to enjoy the poem. Your criticism constantly tends to get away from the work of art, and to centre attention on yourself and your feelings." But his answer would not be difficult to find: "What you say is true enough. My criticism tends to get farther and farther from the work of art and to cast a light upon myself; but all criticism

tends to get away from the work of art and to substitute something in its place. The impressionist substitutes himself, but what other form of criticism gets closer to 'Prometheus Unbound'? Historical criticism takes us away from it in a search of the environment, the age, the race, the poetic school of the artist; it tells us to read the history of the French Revolution, Godwin's 'Political Justice,' the 'Prometheus Bound' of Æschylus, and Calderon's 'Magico Prodigioso.' Psychological criticism takes me away from the poem, and sets me to work on the biography of the poet; I wish to enjoy 'Prometheus Unbound,' and instead I am asked to become acquainted with Shelley the man. Dogmatic criticism does not get any closer to the work of art by testing it according to rules and standards; it sends me to the Greek dramatists, to Shakspeare, to Aristotle's 'Poetics,' possibly to Darwin's 'Origin of Species,' in order that I may see how far Shelley has failed to give dramatic reality to his poem, or has failed to observe the rules of his *genre*; but that means

the study of other works, and not of 'Prometheus Unbound.' Æsthetics takes me still farther afield into speculations on art and beauty. And so it is with every form of criticism. Do not deceive yourself. All criticism tends to shift the interest from the work of art to something else. The other critics give us history, politics, biography, erudition, metaphysics. As for me, I re-dream the poet's dream, and if I seem to write lightly, it is because I have awakened, and smile to think I have mistaken a dream for reality. I at least strive to replace one work of art by another, and art can only find its *alter ego* in art."

It would be idle to detail the arguments with which the advocates of the opposing forms of Criticism answered these questionings. Literary erudition and evolutionary science were the chief weapons used to fight this modern heresy, but the one is an unwieldy and the other a useless weapon in the field of æsthetic thought. On some sides, at least, the position of the impressionists was impregnable; but

two points of attack were open to their opponents. They could combat the notion that taste is a substitute for learning, or learning a substitute for taste, since both are vital for Criticism; and they could maintain that the relativity of taste does not in any sense affect its authority. But these arguments are not my present concern; what I wish to point out is that the objective and dogmatic forms of Criticism were fighting no new battle against impressionistic Criticism in that decade of controversy. It was a battle as old as the earliest reflection on the subject of poetry, if not as old as the sensitiveness of poets. Modern literature begins with the same doubts, with the same quarrel. In the sixteenth century the Italians were formulating that classical code which imposed itself on Europe for two centuries, and which, even in our generation, Brunetière has merely disguised under the trappings of natural science. They evolved the dramatic unities, and all those rules which the poet Pope imagined to be "Nature still but Nature methodized." But at the very

moment when their spokesman Scaliger was saying that "Aristotle is our emperor, the perpetual dictator of all the fine arts," another Italian, Pietro Aretino, was insisting that there is no rule except the whim of genius and no standard of judgment beyond individual taste.

The Italians passed on the torch to the French of the seventeenth century, and from that day to this the struggle between the two schools has never ceased to agitate the progress of Criticism in France. Boileau against Saint-Évremond, Classicists against Romanticists, dogmatists against impressionists, — the antinomy is deep in the French nature, indeed in the nature of Criticism itself. Listen to this: "It is not for the purpose of deciding on the merit of this noble poet [Virgil], nor of harming his reputation, that I have spoken so freely concerning him. The world will continue to think what it does of his beautiful verses; and as for me, I judge nothing, I only say what I think, and what effect each of these things produces on my heart and mind." Surely these words are from the lips of Le-

maître himself! "I judge nothing; I only say what I feel." But no, these are the utterances of the Chevalier de Méré, a wit of the age of Louis XIV, and he is writing to the secretary of that stronghold of authority, the French Academy. For some men, even in the age of Boileau, criticism was nothing but an "adventure among masterpieces."

No, it is no new battle; it is the perpetual conflict of Criticism. In every age impressionism (or enjoyment) and dogmatism (or judgment) have grappled with one another. They are the two sexes of Criticism; and to say that they flourish in every age is to say that every age has its masculine as well as its feminine criticism, — the masculine criticism that may or may not force its own standards on Literature, but that never at all events is dominated by the object of its studies; and the feminine criticism that responds to the lure of art with a kind of passive ecstasy. In the age of Boileau it was the masculine type which gave the tone to Criticism; in our own, outside of the universities, it has certainly been the feminine.

But they continue to exist side by side, ever falling short of their highest powers, unless mystically mated, — judgment erecting its edicts into arbitrary standards and conventions, enjoyment lost in the mazes of its sensuous indecision.

Yet if we examine these opposing forms of Criticism in our own age, we shall find, I think, that they are not wholly without a common ground to meet on; that, in fact, they are united in at least one prepossession which they do not share with the varying forms of Criticism in any of the earlier periods of its history. The Greeks conceived of Literature, not as an inevitable expression of creative power, but as a reasoned “imitation” or re-shaping of the materials of life; for Aristotle, poetry is the result of man’s imitative instinct, and differs from history and science in that it deals with the probable or possible rather than with the real. The Romans conceived of Literature as a noble art, intended (though under the guise of pleasure) to inspire men with high ideals of life. The classicists of the sixteenth and seven-

teenth centuries accepted this view in the main ; for them, Literature was a kind of exercise, — a craft acquired by study of the classics, and guided in the interpretation of nature by the traditions of Greek and Roman art. For these men Literature was as much a product of reason as science or history. The eighteenth century complicated the course of Criticism by the introduction of vague and novel criteria, such as “imagination,” “sentiment,” and “taste.” But with the Romantic Movement there developed the new idea which coördinates all Criticism in the nineteenth century. Very early in the century, Mme. de Staël and others formulated the idea that Literature is an “expression of society.” Victor Cousin founded the school of art for art’s sake, enunciating “the fundamental rule, that expression is the supreme law of art.” Later, Sainte-Beuve developed and illustrated his theory that Literature is an expression of personality. Still later, under the influence of natural science, Taine took a hint from Hegel and elaborated the idea that Literature is an ex-

pression of race, age, and environment. The extreme impressionists prefer to think of art as the exquisite expression of delicate and fluctuating sensations or impressions of life. But for all these critics and theorists, Literature is an expression of something, of experience or emotion, of the external or internal, of the man himself or something outside the man; yet it is always conceived of as an art of expression. The objective, the dogmatic, the impressionistic critics of our day may set for themselves very different tasks, but the idea of expression is implicit in all they write. They have, as it were, this bond of blood: they are not merely man and woman, but brother and sister; and their father, or grandfather, was Sainte-Beuve. The bitter but acute analysis of his talent which Nietzsche has given us in the "Twilight of the Idols" brings out very clearly this dual side of his seminal power, the feminine sensitiveness and the masculine detachment. For Nietzsche, he is "nothing of a man; he wanders about, delicate, curious, tired, pumping people, a female after all,

with a woman's revengefulness and a woman's sensuousness, a critic without a standard, without firmness, and without backbone." Here it is the impressionist in Sainte-Beuve that arouses the German's wrath. But in the same breath we find Nietzsche blaming him for "holding up objectivity as a mask"; and it is on this objective side that Sainte-Beuve becomes the source of all those historical and psychological forms of critical study which have influenced the academic thought of our day, leading insensibly, but inevitably, from empirical investigation to empirical law. The pedigree of the two schools thereafter is not difficult to trace: on the one side, from Sainte-Beuve through *l'art pour l'art* to impressionism, and on the other, from Sainte-Beuve through Taine to Brunetière and his egregious kin.

French criticism has been leaning heavily on the idea of expression for a century or more, but no attempt has been made in France to understand its æsthetic content, except for a few vague echoes of German thought. For the first to give philosophic precision to the theory

of expression, and to found a method of Criticism based upon it, were the Germans of the age that stretches from Herder to Hegel. All the forces of philosophical thought were focused on this central concept, while the critics enriched themselves from out this golden store. I suppose you all remember the famous passage in which Carlyle describes the achievement of German criticism in that age. "Criticism," says Carlyle, "has assumed a new form in Germany. It proceeds on other principles and proposes to itself a higher aim. The main question is not now a question concerning the qualities of diction, the coherence of metaphors, the fitness of sentiments, the general logical truth in a work of art, as it was some half century ago among most critics; neither is it a question mainly of a psychological sort to be answered by discovering and delineating the peculiar nature of the poet from his poetry, as is usual with the best of our own critics at present: but it is, not indeed exclusively, but inclusively of its two other questions, properly and ultimately a question of the essence and peculiar

life of the poetry itself. . . . The problem is not now to determine by what mechanism Addison composed sentences and struck out similitudes, but by what far finer and more mysterious mechanism Shakspeare organized his dramas and gave life and individuality to his Ariel and his Hamlet. Wherein lies that life; how have they attained that shape and individuality? Whence comes that empyrean fire which irradiates their whole being and appears at least in starry gleams? Are these dramas of his not veri-similar only, but true; nay, truer than reality itself, since the essence of unmixed reality is bodied forth in them under more expressive similes? What is this unity of pleasures; and can our deeper inspection discern it to be indivisible and existing by necessity because each work springs as it were from the general elements of thought and grows up therefrom into form and expansion by its own growth? Not only who was the poet and how did he compose; but what and how was the poem, and why was it a poem and not rhymed eloquence, creation and not figured

passion? These are the questions for the critic. Criticism stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired; between the prophet and those who hear the melody of his words and catch some glimpse of their material meaning but understand not their deeper import."

I am afraid that no German critic wholly realized this ideal; but it was at least the achievement of the Germans that they enunciated the doctrine, even if they did not always adequately illustrate it in practice. It was they who first realized that art has performed its function when it has expressed itself; it was they who first conceived of Criticism as the study of expression. "There is a destructive and a creative or constructive criticism," said Goethe; the first measures and tests Literature according to mechanical standards, the second answers the fundamental questions: "What has the writer proposed to himself to do? and how far has he succeeded in carrying out his own plan?" Carlyle, in his essay on Goethe, almost uses

Goethe's own words, when he says that the critic's first and foremost duty is to make plain to himself "what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his eye, and how far, with such materials as were afforded him, he has fulfilled it." This has been the central problem, the guiding star, of all modern criticism. From Coleridge to Pater, from Sainte-Beuve to Lemaître, this is what critics have been striving for, even when they have not succeeded; yes, even when they have been deceiving themselves into thinking that they were striving for something else. This was not the ideal of Aristotle when he tells us that the critic may censure a work of art as "irrational, impossible, morally hurtful, self-contradictory, or contrary to technical correctness." This was not Boileau's standard when he blamed Tasso for the introduction of Christian rather than pagan mythology into epic poetry; nor Addison's, when he tested "*Paradise Lost*" according to the rules of Le Bossu; nor Dr. Johnson's, when he laments the absence of

poetic justice in "King Lear," or pronounces dogmatically that the poet should not "number the streaks of the tulip." What has the poet tried to do, and how has he fulfilled his intention? What is he striving to express and how has he expressed it? What impression does his work make on me, and how can I best express this impression? These are the questions that nineteenth-century critics have been taught to ask when face to face with the work of a poet.

The theory of expression, the concept of Literature as an art of expression, is the common ground on which critics have met for a century or more. Yet how many absurdities, how many complicated systems, how many confusions, have been superimposed on this fundamental idea; and how slowly has its full significance become the possession of critics! To accept the naked principle is to play havoc with these confusions and complications; and no one has seen this more clearly, or driven home its inevitable consequences with more intelligence and vigor,

than an Italian thinker and critic of our own day, Benedetto Croce, who has received of late a kind of official introduction to the English-speaking world in the striking compliment paid to him by Mr. Balfour in a recent Romanes Lecture. But I for one needed no introduction to his work; under his banner I enrolled myself long ago, and here re-enroll myself in what I now say. He has led æsthetic thought inevitably from the concept that art is expression to the conclusion that all expression is art. Time does not permit, nor reason ask, that we should follow this argument through all its *pros* and *cons*. If this theory of expression be once and for all accepted, as indeed it has been partly though confusedly accepted by all modern critics, the ground of Criticism is cleared of its dead lumber and its weeds. I propose now merely to point out this dead lumber and these weeds. In other words, we shall see to what conclusions the critical thought and practice of a century have been inevitably converging, and what elements of the old

Criticism and the old literary history are disappearing from the new.

In the first place, we have done with all the old Rules. The very conception of "rules" harks back to an age of magic, and reminds the modern of those mysterious words which the heroes of the fairy-tales are without reason forbidden to utter; the rules are a survival of the savage *taboo*. We find few arbitrary rules in Aristotle, who limited himself to empirical inductions from the experience of Literature; but they appear in the later Greek rhetoricians; and in the Romans empirical induction has been hardened into dogma. Horace lays down the law to the prospective playwright in this manner: "You must never have more than three actors on the stage at any one time; you must never let your drama exceed five acts." It is unnecessary to trace the history of these rules, or to indicate how they increased in number, how they were arranged into a system by the classicists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and how they burdened the creative art of that period.

They were never without their enemies. We have seen how Aretino was pitted against Scaliger, Saint-Évremond against Boileau; and in every age the poets have astounded the critics by transgressing rules without the sacrifice of beauty. But it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the Romanticists banished them from the province of Criticism. The pedantry of our own day has borrowed "conventions" from history and "technique" from science as substitutes for the outworn formulæ of the past; but these are merely new names for the old mechanical rules; and they too will go, when criticism clearly recognizes in every work of art an organism governed by its own law.

We have done with the *genres*, or literary kinds. Their history is inseparably bound up with that of the classical rules. Certain works of literature have a general resemblance and are loosely classed together (for the sake of convenience) as lyric, comedy, tragedy, epic, pastoral, and the like; the classicists made of each of these divisions a fixed norm gov-

erned by inviolable laws. The separation of the *genres* was a consequence of this law of classicism: comedy should not be mingled with tragedy, nor epic with lyric. But no sooner was the law enunciated than it was broken by an artist impatient or ignorant of its restraints, and the critics have been obliged to explain away these violations of their laws, or gradually to change the laws themselves. But if art is organic expression, and every work of art is to be interrogated with the question, "What has it expressed, and how completely?" there is no place for the question whether it has conformed to some convenient classification of critics or to some law derived from this classification. The lyric, the pastoral, the epic, are abstractions without concrete reality in the world of art. Poets do not write epics, pastorals, lyrics; they express themselves, and this expression is their only form. There are not, therefore, only three, or ten, or a hundred literary kinds; there are as many kinds as there are individual poets. But it is in the

field of literary history that this error is most obvious. Shakspeare wrote "King Lear," "Venus and Adonis," and a sequence of sonnets. What becomes of Shakspeare, the creative artist, when these three works are separated from one another by the historian of poetry; when they lose their connection with his single creative soul, and are classified with other works with which they have only a loose and vague relation? To slice up the history of English Literature into compartments marked comedy, tragedy, lyric, and the like, is to be guilty of a complete misunderstanding of the meaning of Criticism; and literary history becomes a logical absurdity when its data are not organically related but cut up into sections, and placed in such compartments as these.

We have done with the comic, the tragic, the sublime, and an army of vague abstractions of their kind. These have grown out of the generalizations of the Alexandrian critics, acquiring a new lease of life in the eighteenth century. Gray and his friend West corre-

sponded with each other on the subject of the sublime; later, Schiller distinguished between the naïf and the sentimental. Jean Paul was one of many who defined humor, and Hegel among those who defined the tragic. If these terms represent the content of art, they may be relegated to the same category as joy, hate, sorrow, enthusiasm; and we should speak of the comic in the same general way in which we might speak of the expression of joy in a poem. If, on the other hand, these terms represent abstract classifications of poetry, their use in criticism sins against the very nature of art. Every poet re-expresses the universe in his own way, and every poem is a new and independent expression. The tragic does not exist for Criticism, but only Æschylus, Shakspeare, Racine. There is no objection to the use of the word tragic as a convenient label for somewhat similar poems, but to find laws for the tragic and to test creative artists by such laws as these is simply to give a more abstract form to the outworn classical conception of dramatic rules.

We have done with the theory of style, with metaphor, simile, and all the paraphernalia of Græco-Roman rhetoric. These owe their existence to the assumption that style is separated from expression, that it is something which may be added or subtracted at will from the work of art. But we know that art *is* expression, that it is complete in itself, that to alter it is to create another expression and therefore to create another work of art. If the poet, for example, says of springtime that “’Tis now the blood runs gold,” he has not employed a substitute for something else, such as “the blood tingles in our veins”; he has expressed his thought in its completeness, and there is no equivalent for his expression except itself.

“Each perfect in its place; and each content
With that perfection which its being meant.”

Such expressions are still called metaphors in the text-books; but metaphor, simile, and all the old terms of classical rhetoric are signs of the zodiac, magical incantations, astrological formulæ, interesting only to antiquarian

curiosity. To Montaigne they suggested "the prattle of chambermaids"; to me they suggest rather the drone and singsong of many school-mistresses. We still hear talk of the "grand style," and essays on style continue to be written, like the old "arts of poetry" of two centuries ago; but the theory of styles has no longer a real place in modern thought; we have learned that it is no less impossible to study style as separate from the work of art than to study the comic as separate from the work of the comic artist.

We have done with all moral judgment of Literature. Horace said that pleasure and profit are the end of art, and for many centuries the critics quarreled over the terms "pleasure" and "profit." Some said that poetry was meant to instruct; some, merely to please; some, to do both. Romantic criticism first enunciated the principle that art has no aim except expression; that its aim is complete when expression is complete; that "beauty is its own excuse for being." If the achievement of the poet be to express any

material he may select, and to express it with a completeness that we recognize as perfection, obviously morals can play no part in the judgment which criticism may form of his work. No critic of authority now tests literature by the standards of ethics.

We have done with "dramatic" criticism. The theory that the drama is not a creative art, but a by-product of the physical exigencies of the theatre, is as old as the sixteenth century. An Italian scholar of that age was the first to maintain that plays are intended to be acted on a stage, under certain restricted physical conditions, and before a large and heterogeneous crowd; dramatic performance has developed out of these conditions, and the test of its excellence is the pleasure it gives to the mixed audience that supports it. This idea was taken hold of by some of the German romanticists, for the purpose of justifying the Shakspearean drama in its apparent divergence from the classical "rules." Shakspeare cannot be judged by the rules of the Greek theatre (so ran their argument), for the drama is an

inevitable product of theatrical conditions; these conditions in Elizabethan England were not the same as those of Periclean Athens; and it is therefore absurd to judge Shakspeare's practice by that of Sophocles. Here at least the idea helped to bring Shakspeare home to many new hearts by ridding the age of mistaken prejudices, and served a useful purpose, as a specious argument may persuade men to contribute to a noble work, or a mad fanatic may rid the world of a tyrant. But with this achievement its usefulness but not its life was ended. It has been developed into a system, and become a dogma of dramatic critics; it is our contemporary equivalent for the "rules" of seventeenth-century pedantry. As a matter of fact, the dramatic artist is to be judged by no other standard than that applied to any other creative artist: what has he tried to express, and how has he expressed it? It is true that the theatre is not only an art but a business, and the so-called "success" of a play is of vital interest to the theatre in so far as it is a commercial undertaking. The

test of "success" is an economic test, and concerns not art or the criticism of art, but political economy. Valuable contributions to economic and social history have been made by students who have investigated the changing conditions of the theatre and the vicissitudes of taste on the part of theatrical audiences; but these have the same relation to criticism, and to the drama as an art, that a history of the publisher's trade and its influence on the personal fortunes of poets would bear to the history of poetry.

We have done with technique as separate from art. It has been pointed out that style cannot be disassociated from art; and the false air of science which the term "technique" seems to possess should not blind us to the fact that it too involves the same error. "Technique is really personality; that is the reason why the artist cannot teach it, why the pupil cannot learn it, and why the æsthetic critic can understand it," says Oscar Wilde, in a dialogue on "The Critic as Artist," which, amid much perversity and paradox, is

illuminated by many flashes of strange insight. The technique of poetry cannot be separated from its inner nature. Versification cannot be studied by itself, except loosely and for convenience ; it remains always an inherent quality of the single poem. Milton's line : —

“These my sky-robcs spun out of Iris' woof”

is called an iambic pentameter ; but it is not true that artistically it has something in common with every other line possessing the same succession of syllables and accents ; in this sense it is not an iambic pentameter ; it is only one thing ; it is the line : —

“These my sky-robcs spun out of Iris' woof.”

We have done with the history and criticism of poetic themes. It is possible to speak loosely of the handling of such a theme as Prometheus by Æschylus and by Shelley, of the story of Francesca da Rimini by Dante, Stephen Phillips, and D'Annunzio ; but strictly speaking, they are not employing the same theme at all. Each artist is expressing a

certain material and labeling it with an historic name. For Shelley Prometheus is only a label; he is expressing his artistic conception of life, not the history of a Greek Titan; it is the vital flame he has breathed into his work that makes it what it is, and with this vital flame (and not with labels) the critic should concern himself in the works of poets.

We have done with the race, the time, the environment of a poet's work as an element in criticism. To study these phases of a work of art is to treat it as an historic or social document, and the result is a contribution to the history of culture or civilization, without primary interest for the history of art. "Granted the times, the environment, the race, the passions of the poet, what has he done with his materials, how has he converted poetry out of reality?" To answer this question of the Italian De Sanctis as it refers to each single work of art is to perform what is truly the critic's vital function; this is to interpret "expression" in its rightful sense, and to

liberate æsthetic Criticism from the vassalage to *Kulturgeschichte* imposed on it by the school of Taine.

We have done with the "evolution" of Literature. The concept of progress was first applied to Literature in the seventeenth century, but at the very outset Pascal pointed out that a distinction must here be made between science and art; that science advances by accumulation of knowledge, while the changes of art cannot be reduced to any theory of progress. As a matter of fact, the theory involves the ranking of poets according to some arbitrary conception of their value; and the ranking of writers in order of merit has become obsolete, except in the "hundred best books" of the last decade and the "five-foot shelves" of to-day. The later nineteenth century gave a new air of verisimilitude to this old theory by borrowing the term "evolution" from science; but this too involves a fundamental misconception of the free and original movement of art. A similar misconception is involved in the study of the

“origins” of art; for art has no origin separate from man’s life.

“In climes beyond the solar road,
Where shaggy forms o’er ice-built mountains roam,
The Muse has broke the twilight-gloom”;

but though she wore savage raiment, she was no less the Muse. Art is simple at times, complex at others, but it is always art. The simple art of early times may be studied with profit; but the researches of anthropology have no vital significance for criticism, unless the anthropologist studies the simplest forms of art in the same spirit as the highest; that is, unless the anthropologist is an æsthetic critic.

Finally, we have done with the old rupture between genius and taste. When Criticism first propounded as its real concern the oft-repeated question: “What has the poet tried to express and how has he expressed it?” Criticism prescribed for itself the only possible method. How can the critic answer this question without becoming (if only for

a moment of supreme power) at one with the creator? That is to say, taste must reproduce the work of art within itself in order to understand and judge it; and at that moment æsthetic judgment becomes nothing more nor less than creative art itself. The identity of genius and taste is the final achievement of modern thought on the subject of art, and it means that fundamentally the creative and the critical instincts are one and the same. From Goethe to Carlyle, from Carlyle to Arnold, from Arnold to Symons, there has been much talk of the "creative function" of Criticism. For each of these men the phrase held a different content; for Arnold it meant merely that criticism creates the intellectual atmosphere of the age, — a social function of high importance, perhaps, yet wholly independent of æsthetic significance. But the ultimate truth toward which these men were tending was more radical than that, and plays havoc with all the old platitudes about the sterility of taste. Criticism at last can free itself of its age-long self-contempt, now that it may

realize that æsthetic judgment and artistic creation are instinct with the same vital life. Without this identity, Criticism would really be impossible. "Genius is to æsthetics what the ego is to philosophy, the only supreme and absolute reality," said Schelling; and without subduing the mind to this transcendental system, it remains true that what must always be inexplicable to mere reflection is just what gives power to poetry; that intellectual curiosity may amuse itself by asking its little questions of the silent sons of light, but they vouchsafe no answer to art's pale shadow, thought; the gods are kind if they give up their secret in another work of art, the art of Criticism, that serves as some sort of mirror to the art of Literature, only because in their flashes of insight taste and genius are one.

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